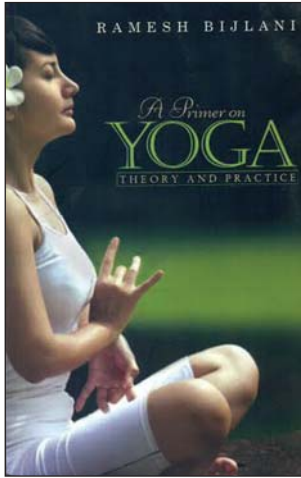


## Book Reviews

**A Primer on Yoga: Theory and Practice.** Ramesh Bijlani. National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2015. 132 pp, ₹132. ISBN 81-237-7641-1.



There is a growing consensus among biomedical scientists that 21st century health problems can be resolved better by integrating meditation and medication. If pharmaceutical drugs are medicines for the body, meditation is medicine for the mind. The power of the mind is now being recognized by science especially because of the emergence of new disciplines such as epigenetics. This is probably the golden period when contemporary relevance, curiosity and acceptance of Yoga is reaching new heights. The

International Yoga Day unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly is testimony to the growing interest in Yoga. This has led to many fly-by-night service providers and wellness gurus in many countries. Such business-driven propagation of Yoga is leading to a distorted perception, preconceived notions and fragmented understanding, reduced to physical postures and fancy packages. Many strange variants of yogic practices, clans and cults are adding to the confusion for the genuine seeker.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is the most authoritative classic. Its translation and commentaries are available; however, it is rather difficult for a common person to understand its theory and practice. About a century ago Sri Aurobindo's landmark book *Synthesis of Yoga* explained the basic principles and practice for achieving higher levels of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's teaching highlighted the value of Yoga much beyond physical postures and inspired millions to rediscover its path towards consciousness and spirituality. There was a need to present Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and thoughts in a simple, scientific and convincing manner for the 21st century reader. This crucial need has been met with the publication of this outstanding book. The author is a disciple of Sri Aurobindo who has first-hand knowledge of Yoga and modern biomedical science. As a former Professor of Physiology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, the author has authoritatively introduced the right spirit of Yoga. The readers will also benefit from a DVD, which serves as an audiovisual guide for practice. This book is extremely useful to demystify Yoga and provide practical insights needed for emphatic propagation.

As rightly stated by Sri Aurobindo, 'Yoga is the founding of all life and consciousness in the Divine.' The author successfully explains philosophical interpretations in very simple language for practical application of Yoga in day-to-day life. This primer gives an interesting discourse based on real-life examples, which can change readers' outlook towards Yoga. The book provides philosophy and science of Yoga in easily understandable, eloquent language. The author discusses various facets of Yoga and its

usefulness for self-improvement, reducing suffering, and promoting planetary health, happiness and bliss.

This book is positioned as a primer for the informed practice of Yoga. The author has provided a wide-angle view of Yoga explaining its techniques along with philosophical descriptions related to renunciation, asceticism, sacrifice and ways to attain identity with the Divine. He has lucidly explained important classes of Yoga as Hatha Yoga, Raj Yoga, Tantra Yoga and the convergent view as Integral Yoga. The Hatha Yoga focuses more on *pranayama* and *asana*. *Asanas* are not merely physical postures or exercise but they consist of sophisticated progressive cyclic stages leading to relaxation, rejuvenation and inflow of vital force. The author has explained the link between physical practices and spirituality. The author has given simple tips for the correct pattern of breathing—slow, deep and full breathing involving the abdomen, chest and shoulders. The author suggests that practice of systematic breathing for 5 minutes a day is the simplest form of *pranayama*, which can lead to relaxation and improved efficiency for the whole day. The author cautions regarding the use of few *asanas* for specific diseases.

The author describes Patanjali's eight-fold Yoga as 'limbs' and not steps. As the author mentions, these interpretations are tested in the Aurobindo Ashram, which is an open laboratory of Yoga and spirituality for many years. The first two limbs *yama* and *niyama* provide guidance for good living; the next two limbs *asana* and *pranayama* are physical techniques and the fifth limb *pratyahara* turns outward consciousness into inward. The last three limbs *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi* are the processes of looking inwards. The concepts of *yama* and *niyama* are elaborated with appropriate quotes followed by practical guidance. For example, *santosh* (contentment) is about managing our desires. The desires can turn into contentment if we train ourselves to predict the effects of desires. The meaning of *tapas* is generally taken as torture or austerity but actually it is for creating ability to concentrate energies on an important goal. *Ishwar pranidhana* is surrender to the divine will, which expands our thoughts and actions towards higher levels of consciousness. *Samadhi* is 'not something to be done but it is something to happen'. The specialty of Raj Yoga is the meditation types involving mindfulness and concentration. The selection of the type is dependent on mood and temperament. Meditation helps to keep our mind calm and peaceful. It increases our ability to concentrate. Discovering our identity and reaching towards silence from chaos are the real goals of meditation. The author describes *Gita* as the perfect student-friendly guide that helps to resolve conflicts and prevents psychological problems. The author describes various approaches including dedication to work (*karma*), unending quest for knowledge (*jnana*) and total devotion (*bhakti*) as key approaches of Yoga. All these approaches finally converge on the same goal.

As an eminent physiologist, the author rightly cautions about equating *chakras* to nerve plexus. According to him the description of Yoga also involves the subtle body, which modern science has not yet understood or accepted. One of the unique features of this book is a section on 'Frequently asked questions'. The author has given scientific answers to important questions with advice on contraindications, optimal timing, untoward effects of *asana* and *pranayama* and meditation.

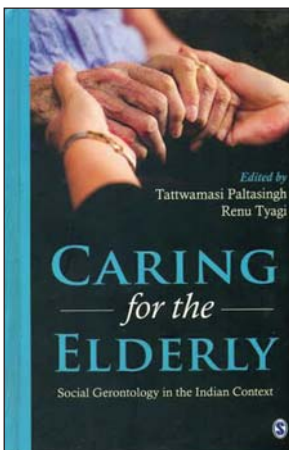
The book includes a useful DVD on the physical practice of

Yoga on the theme 'Feel better, get better'. This book provides a practical guide for physical practices of Yoga including exercises, stretching, breathing, relaxation, *surya namaskar*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *kapalbhati* and deep relaxation. The book gives a valuable message to readers that the 'Divine' is nothing but our own deepest self. Sri Aurobindo's concept of integral yoga is open to all and encompasses different techniques. Some of the key messages of this book are: Yoga goes beyond physical workout and therapy; Yoga is not about its practice for an hour, but it teaches how to inculcate spirituality for 24 hours as a lifelong commitment. Practice of Yoga is the solution for perceptible change towards higher level of planetary consciousness and bringing oneness among all living beings. Yoga is not only a 'way of life' but 'all life is Yoga'. As said by Sri Aurobindo, 'spirituality is the next step of human evolution'. The book elaborates the path towards divinity, where health is just a milestone in this journey.

The book has been published at a time when the interest of common people in Yoga is increasing all over the world. This book and the accompanying DVD should serve as an authoritative practical guide for Yoga enthusiasts, students and even teachers. The author must be congratulated for writing such a simple, scientific, concise and comprehensive account of the theory and practice of Yoga.

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**Caring for the Elderly: Social gerontology in the Indian context.** Tattwamasi Paltasingh, Renu Tyagi (eds). Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2015. 290 pp, ₹995. ISBN 978-93-515-0263-0.



India, like many other countries, is experiencing an increase in the size of the elderly population. We all agree on one fact about health among the elderly that life expectancy has increased. Old age presents unique problems but these have been aggravated due to the unprecedented speed of socioeconomic transformation, impacting changes in living conditions. The needs and problems of the elderly vary according to their age, socioeconomic status, health, living status, etc. The science of

gerontology is still in its infancy in India and the interest of social scientists and social work professionals on various issues of

ageing is of recent origin. Only recently were older people identified as a priority group in implementation of social welfare policies and government interventions. An ageing population requires continued support at all levels, but India appears to be falling short in dealing with major geriatric issues.

There is a lack of scientific literature to describe psychosocial processes of ageing, societal attitude towards older persons, feminization of ageing, dominance of widowhood, inequalities in old-age health and care, functional autonomy and elderly well-being, and also the inadequate interest displayed by the state, media and civil society organizations. These are some factors that have prompted the authors to address a range of issues with a bearing on social, economic and health aspects of ageing in India.

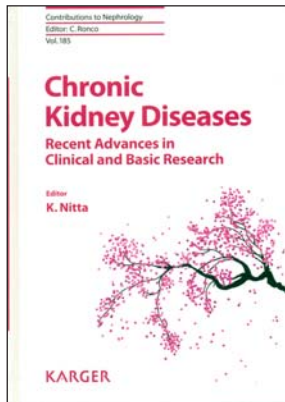
The book very agreeably includes a discussion of theories and concepts of gerontology and then suitably moves to a set of major socioeconomic and health ramifications of ageing. The discussions are further supplemented by a brief perspective on gender and cultural aspects and also link key issues with positive and active ageing. The book efficiently attempts to raise questions and reinstate policy dialogues through conceptual and theoretical understanding supported by empirical evidence. A systematic description of the literature on gerontology reflects the ideas, information and research literature on diverse ageing issues.

The book is broadly categorized into five thematic sections that provide an extensive understanding of social gerontology, covering ageism, intergenerational solidarity, institutional mechanisms, gender, culture, care, welfare measures and theoretical as well as demographic context of the 'ageing' population. The authors highlight an absence of consensus for a definite path and an existence of a universal theory in gerontology. The book illustrates major findings of two different surveys of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) and a critical evaluation of the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). This is followed by a discussion on the inadequacy of the present poverty reduction measures for the elderly population linking them to economic issues related to work, retirement and pension benefits. The cross-cultural variation of health in diverse population groups inhabiting different regions of India and possible factors that predispose the elderly towards functional impairment have been discussed. A resourceful attempt has been made to discuss the prospective approach to healthy ageing that needs comprehensive, holistic services for short-term and long-term care with a focus on stakeholder contribution.

Given the inadequate attention on ageing issues, especially in developing countries such as India, there is a need for a knowledge base on population ageing. This book is a necessary addition to the geriatric literature. The edited volume is particularly welcome for its new look towards positive ageing. The book is an informative read for students, teachers, researchers, gerontologists, geriatricians and policy-makers and programme managers associated with ageing issues.

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**Chronic Kidney Diseases: Recent advances in clinical and basic research.** K. Nitta (ed). Karger, Basel, 2015. 173 pp, price not mentioned. ISBN 978-3-318-05464-4.



There has been a worldwide increase in the prevalence of chronic kidney disease (CKD). When CKD progresses to end-stage renal disease (ESRD), patients require maintenance dialysis or renal transplantation. Owing to a paucity of kidney donors, maintenance dialysis continues to be the more commonly used treatment in these patients. With improved life expectancy, elderly patients are more frequently receiving maintenance dialysis.

They have multiple comorbid conditions and dialysis-related complications. Japan has an ageing population, and their research is focused on improving the long-term prognosis of elderly CKD patients. This book is a compilation of some research papers presented at the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society for Dialysis Therapy in 2015 and reviews common complications seen in patients with CKD requiring dialysis.

Instead of delineating the entire spectrum of complications in CKD, this book covers an eclectic mix of some common issues observed in CKD patients on dialysis. It discusses interesting topics such as abnormal bone and iron metabolism in CKD, use of dipeptidyl peptidase-4 (DPP-4) inhibitors in diabetic CKD patients, vascular calcification and cerebrovascular disease in dialysis patients. For specific modalities of dialysis, there are chapters on types of dialysers used for haemodialysis, purification and constitution of the dialysis fluid and a discussion on encapsulating peritoneal sclerosis, which is a rare but serious complication of

peritoneal dialysis. The research articles are related to clinical issues in dialysis such as effect of pre-dilution haemodiafiltration, use of lanthanum carbonate as a phosphate binder and vascular access for long-term dialysis. These have practical relevance for all nephrologists and trainees.

The reviews provide up-to-date information on each topic covering the pathogenesis, diagnostic and therapeutic approach and critical analysis of relevant studies. All the chapters provide data that can help nephrologists in making clinical decisions.

The reviews on present status of home haemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis as well as cost-effectiveness of haemodialysis depict the present scenario of dialysis and the related problems in Japan. Though specific to Japan, these chapters also have learning points for clinicians as well as policy-makers in other countries.

Some chapters review basic science research related to CKD such as bone and iron metabolism, Klotho-FGF23 axis and cell sheet-based tissue engineering of mesothelial cell injury.

All the chapters are well-written, concise and comprehensive. The editor might have considered classifying the articles into clinical nephrology and basic science sections and separating the original articles from the reviews for a more organized presentation.

The common problems seen in CKD patients, especially in an ageing population and research done in Japan to improve the outcome of these patients on dialysis have been successfully highlighted by the editor. However, these issues are relevant for all patients with CKD across the world. This book has a strong local flavour but universal appeal.

Unfortunately, in this era of easy access to information on the internet, this book's main limitation is not being complete and including only limited relevant topics.

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